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Bullies And Victims: A Charming Education To Cope With Distress

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Abstract

Recent years have been marked by the unexpected pace with which changes happen in every aspect of life constantly transforming the horizons of meaning, thereby disorientation and confusion create a “distress” affecting not only adults, but also young people. In all countries, the main issue spotted is, indeed, the exponential increase of young malaise arising in every direction: bullying, drugs, alcohol abuse, and everything else. In particular, bullying is increasing, a phenomenon marked out by recurring and continuing abuse actions. It has become quite evident that the present period of changes requires the need of more incisive educational strategies in formal and informal education in order to give to the new generations a better understanding of present issues, with their social and individual effects, and a “healthy” growth.

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1. Introduction

Postmodern society is marked out by its frenetic rhythms, high technology, sudden structural innovations, and invasive mass media. A society as such originates sudden and deep changes in society, economy and politics, creating, in the social sphere, a vast pluralism of behaviours – all simultaneous existing and precursors of unpredictability – and new ways of life connected to individual and society. The consequent unpredictability does not make people understand ultimate goals of actions or behaviours, creating what Phenomenological Sociology clearly describes as “the lack of a stable and comforting dwelling, the lack of a regular and reliable life routine which could have ceased the agony of a constant fight aimed to stop or reduce the flow, to solidify the flow, to give shape to the unshaped” (Nels, 1997: 141).

The lack of safe horizons makes people losing sight of their own ways and future goals up to confuse them. People become weaker and a widespread malaise is evident in all existential fields. “The man navigates on sight, and not having the tools to deal with the changes, emerges the discomfort, which is the discomfort of civilization:

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we are in a historical moment in which, paradoxically, is not only thinking back, but redefining the human” (Bauman, 2000: 86).

The present age is paradoxically marked out by not only a reconsideration but also a redefinition of human being. Thus, the alphabet of humanity seems to be about to get lost with its information about human beings, values and constitutive categories, coexistence, society.

2. Characteristics of bullying

In all countries, the main issue spotted is the exponential increase of individual malaise – especially for youth – concerning all aspects: drugs, alcohol abuse, bullying, and everything else. Families, schools, society are unable to manage children’s difficulties. The profound social changes that have characterized the society, the family and the school in recent years, have played a key role in influencing the characteristics of personality and behavior-not only of adults-but especially of children and adolescents, for which the bullying could be a behavioral mode to increase its visibility, satisfy the need of attention, security and, affectivity.

Whereas on one hand children seem to be more and more aggressive, on the other hand they appear to be emotionally weak, in need of protection and safety. In fact, one of the emerging phenomena is the one that can be ascribed to a power play called bullying[†].

Characterized by recurring and continuing actions of abuse, bullying arises more often before and in the age of puberty.

People involved are boys and girls belonging to all social backgrounds with particular gender peculiarities: a male predisposition to use direct courses of action and a feminine predisposition to take advantage of indirect aggressiveness (Avalle, 2013: 84-87).

The *protagonists* involved in this play of power are two or more leading actors and several minor actors: *bullies, victims, bully’s and victim’s friends*:

- The *bully* is the active leading actor, the person who makes aggressions and abuses of power. He or she tries to dominate the weak through violence and abuse. Bullies abuse verbally and physically their victims putting them in a state of constant domination and subjugation.

- The *victim* is the person who suffers abuses. Victims are unable to defend themselves, they are frequently excluded by their peers as well.

- A strong asymmetric relation of power is set between bullies and victims. The victim seems not to provoke his or her aggressor who is actively in search of her or him instead.

This two roles might be personified by individuals or groups of people. As a matter of fact, it might happen that a person is abused by a group of people, but it might also happen that the role of victim is played by a whole group of people.

- Bully’s followers or friends*. Some members of the group may join with the bully in order to get their own role and identity. In this way, they contribute to keep and increase the phenomenon by emulating or giving help to the bully for the pleasure to be respected and dreaded or for the fear of being the next in line to be bullied. Compared with their leader, followers appear to be less popular and more anxious and insecure.

- Peers*. Certain behaviours are more or less intentionally covered up or sometimes produced by the background.

- Consequences*. To understand what bullying really is, it is important to understand the seriousness of effects that bullying has on victim. Indeed, They are complex and include a double discomfort: the one affecting the bully and the one affecting the victim.

The bully shows a certain psychological discomfort with his or her behaviours which belongs to the conduct disorder, in other words behaviours in which the basic rights of others are violated.

On the contrary, persecuted by one or more peers, the victim feels a sense of impotence and an immense discomfort, appearing unable to react because of fear or shame.

With regard to the adult world, what is expected by the victim is the indifference and what is expected by the bully is the consent.

[†] In the 70’s, Dan Olweus, Professor of Psychology (Bergen University, Norway), reported the problem and said: “A student is victim of bullying-abused or victimized- when he or she is repeatedly exposed to offensive actions made by one or more peers”.

3. Types of bullying. Characters profile. Causes of bullying

Direct and indirect actions may cause the constant state of mortification experienced by victims. *Direct bullying* describes evident and direct attacks on the victim. It might include verbal attacks such as mockeries, threatening, humiliating or physical attacks like shoves, kicks, punches, extortion or destruction of personal things. On the contrary, *indirect bullying* describes hidden attacks for instance calumnies and falsehoods. Both types of bullying have the same aim: the victim's isolation and exclusion (Volturo, 2011: 81-94).

- Bully's profile.

According to analyses, studies and experiences, it is possible to outline the bully's profile. In general terms, bullies are subjects with little empathy, with a strong drive to leadership and abuse of power. They seem to be afraid of nothing. Bullies are contentious and hardly ever follow the rules. They always try to question authority, parents or teachers.

In short, bullies have got a high level of self-esteem, considering themselves stronger and better than anyone else. They are smart and good at sports or at group works. In general terms, their school performances are sufficient but can decrease in the course of time. The profile is completed by a low level of tolerance, of frustration and great control abilities.

-Victim's profile

With regard to the victim's profile, experts believe that some main characteristics are prevailing. Victims are boys or girls who feel themselves weaker than bullies and peers; victims try to defend themselves without assertive behaviours, they are against violence, thus unable to defend themselves. Victims are usually not good at sports and may show the fear of hurt themselves. They may belong to a social or ethnical minority group as well.

Main personality traits are sensitivity, prudence, shyness, placidity, and fragility. A distinctive category of victims – provocative victims – includes abuses actively caused by victims who behave and suffer abuse as if the victim would bully and victim at the same time.

-Bullying over time

Once victims and persecutors' roles are set, it is hard to give them up. They often keep on playing with their roles over time running the risk to lose their own identities. A behavioural style as such produces consequences over time affecting victims and persecutors.

As the years go by, bullies observe a decrease of school performance, suffering specific behavioural disorders related to the inability to follow rules. They can present social disorders as well. Bullies fail often classes. They adopt antisocial and deviant behaviours, acts of crime, stealing and vandalism, becoming violent in the family and at work. Abusive behaviours might produce other problematic behaviours as alcoholism, crimes and drug abuse (Gatti et al., 2013: 234-307).

On the other hand, victims have physical symptoms as headache or stomach-ache and psychological symptoms as sleeping disorders, nightmares, panic attack, learning and concentration disorders, decrease of school performance, refusal of school, identity devaluation. Over time, victims might become anxious and insecure with a very low self-estimation. The exclusion from peer group makes school performance worse. In addition, victims avoid to talk about what they suffer.

Studies and researches indicate at least three probable psychological causes:

1 Bullies have a strong need of power and control. They enjoy to abuse and control others.

2 Family context is often inapt making bully develop a certain level of social hostility. Records show that it is always present an emotional disorder which originates from family. It might be the result of overprotection, overindulgence in society and weak or absent rules[‡].

3 Deceptive behaviours: victims are usually obliged to give bullies money, candies, cigarettes, beer, values. In addition, aggressive behaviours get an increase of prestige as reward.

4. Bullies and Victims: How to recognize and prevent the phenomenon

[‡] Actions against Bullying National Guidelines, Ministerial Directive n.16, 15 February 2007.

Bullies are likely to have aggressive behaviours in other contexts as well. They might make fun of someone in a continuing or serious way. They might reprimand, intimidate, treat or hit someone. They might also damage things. Bullies are not interested in scolding because they do not see bullying as a problem. It is possible to identify victims by some behaviours. In the worst scenario, they might choose to hide physical marks, like wounds, bruises, cuts or scratches because of shame or fear of judgement.

Victims might come to ask for money or steal it from family. They hesitate to go to school reporting stomach-ache and head-ache. They have constant mood swings, for instance a girl might be nervous, mournful and sad after school. Victims have sleep disorders and/or nightmares. They come back from school with pleated or ripped clothes and with their own things ruined. They never take home their school mates and hang out with them after school. School performance decreases as well (Oliverio Ferraris, 2014: 20-25).

To contain similar relational dynamics, symptomatic of a widespread social malaise and synonymous of social disorder affecting teenagers and youth, without any social and age restriction, it is important to take action in advance as long as conditions to change bad behaviours still exist and the adults concerned (parents, teachers, experts) still have the chance to operate in order to prevent and contrast them (Civita, 2007: 31).

Parents' role. Parents are supposed to work on essential topics as respect, mutual assistance, support and social life. They are often the only ones able to see alarm bells, a very important moment since victims will likely never talk about the problem. Parents' role is essential: once identified the problem, parents might operate to promote dialog without a guilty or punitive approach (Ronci et al., 2010: 11-159). They should cooperate with school, paying attention to the emotional experiences of their own children. Parents should encourage children to develop their positive features and skills, to build social relationships with peers without isolating.

Parents should teach their own children to ask for help to experts because bullying changes with the passing of time and in the adulthood, it will be present in many social, familiar and working abuses of power (Alandri, 2008:16-44).

5. A charming education to cope with distress

In a period of general crisis, it is possible to contribute to achieve students' training success with a co-operative/relational, laboratorial, inclusive, creative education. An education that uses and educates to use digital culture. By this meaning, the class/group or the educative context is nothing but the *scenario of cultures mediation, a common context where a dialog is possible to be built up* (Whitted & Dupper, 2005:167-175).

Schools must carefully watch students understanding their needs, thus schools have to bring about all possible supports, removing learning barriers for all students independently of any labels. This is a matter of equity and it really lets to accomplish that kind of personalization which usually remains a postulate. With this meaning, schools have a transactional role, thus *giving only contents and facts will increase the length among interlocutors or make the communication exchange tightened*. On the contrary, the comprehension is made easier by relational, cooperative and motivational-oriented strategies.

To be short, educating means making students aware of the need "to learn to learn", to solve problems (La Marca, 2009: 90-103). Learning is made by making hypothesis, questions to oneself and to others, by breaking into different parts the problem and searching for the most trustworthy and complete information to reconstruct the situation, cooperating with the group, avoiding rushed and early judgments, making decision on the strength of information gathered, changing, if necessary, initial points of view.

In particular, schools must become charming and innovative. Teachers are expected to be responsible and to assure quality outcomes. Investments are required in the area of training, technology, sports facilities and professional resources. The use of experts is also important. This way, students are supported to grow with strong personalities, able to cope with adverse situations of life and, at the same time, they will understand that efforts and merits are necessary to get solid results, this is the fundamental educational message.

To activate an educational action pattern aimed primarily to prevent bullying, it is necessary employing active methodologies based, for instance, on 1) co-operation, putting into play personal past and experiences, emotions, and feelings with a direct experimentation like a "group work" which arises as an ongoing-changing dynamic entity and practical means of changing (Freddi, 2007: 145-147); 2) laboratory as socializing area of participation and research, where personal experiences are used as qualifying moments to be connected to action-assumption-realization of the task, understanding it as place of formation, growth, prevention and autonomy (Buccoliero, 2010: 175-187).

Dimensions as above mentioned facilitate the creation and strengthening of relations (Chiarugi e Anichini, 2012: 13-16). Within groups and laboratory (put into action narrative laboratory where people learn how to tell their stories), people get in contact with their own deepest dimension, opening and talking about themselves. Such moments of sharing create more empathy considering that teenagers hardly never talk about themselves because they do not want to show their weakness. For these reasons, a charming and motivating school follows the path of renovation through a communicative channel and some important teaching changes.

6. Conclusions

In the light of what examined, learning and teaching methods, with an international flavour, are necessary in a period of changes for formal and informal education. On the contrary, several shortcuts are given to young people with false messages, but a growth effort is required, a task that implies over time autonomy and a gradual separation from parents (Cambi et al., 2008: 713-715). In shorts, it is required an education that is able to emphasize behaviours and skills needed for a healthy grow, to have success in life, avoiding to be overwhelmed by change (Crothers & Levinson, 2004: 496-503).

The finest place of education is school, it is the essential space where thinking is built and practiced. An innovative education is aware of all this and moves towards regeneration with some important changes, turning to a motivating and charming education (Zanetti et al., 2010: 348-349).

In this way, students learn how to deal with problems, freedom, autonomy, critical thinking, and creativity. To reach these goals, it is necessary investigate the cognitive dimension, promoting intellectual competence, emotional competence, relational and affective competence - where the exchange of ideas takes place, the openness toward others, the interpretation and comparison, and the assignment of value and meaning.

Based on the practical dimension of students and on the self training, the charming education is not a special education to be added to or put alongside the traditional one, it simply is the education able to pay attention to the development of particular skills required to live in this period of time (Morin, 1999: 6-89-90).

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